

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 317

### “The Winter War”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

While the French and British were preoccupied with their war against Germany, and with the blessing of Germany in the secret protocols to their non-aggression agreement, the Soviet Union began to assert itself within its recently designated “sphere of influence.”

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 317. The Winter War.

We’re going to talk about Finland today. We last looked at Finland back in episode 181, part of our 1919 World Tour. I concluded that episode by saying that relations between Finland and Russia would remain tense for the next two decades.

Now here we are, two decades later, and things are tense. Told you so. Bolshevik Russia under Lenin had allowed Finland to secede from its relationship with Russia, though the Bolsheviks felt confident that the revolution would sweep Finland as well and turn it into an allied Communist nation. Finland had its own version of the civil war that splintered Russia, except that in Finland, the Whites, led by Carl Gustaf Mannerheim, the ethnic Swede Finnish Imperial Russian general, routed the Reds, brutally. Finland and Russia signed a peace agreement in 1920.

Finland became a democratic republic, right-leaning in its politics, and was still the same, twenty years later, in 1939. Throughout the 1920s, the new Soviet Union was preoccupied with its internal problems, but by the 1930s, with Stalin emerging as the effective dictator of the USSR and with the Soviet economy and military both rapidly modernizing, Finland was finding itself in an increasingly difficult position.

It was not unlike the position of Poland, wedged between a resurgent Germany and a resurgent Russia, and like Poland, the Finnish government’s foreign policy sought a balance between the two Great Powers: cordial relations with both, alignment with neither. Unlike Poland, Finland had a third option: closer relations with its former ruler Sweden. Finland sought closer ties with

other Scandinavian countries and with Estonia, on the other side of the Gulf of Finland, a country with which Finland shares linguistic and ethnic ties.

In 1932, Finland and the USSR signed a non-aggression agreement. In 1934, the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations. Finland was already a member, so on the face of it, relations between Finland and the Soviet Union were reasonably friendly.

But underneath the surface, the Soviet side was suspicious of Finnish intentions. Sweden was pretty chummy with Germany, which raised questions of whether Finnish efforts to build ties to Sweden were in fact a reflection of a tilt toward Germany. German diplomatic support for Finnish neutrality and for a closer relationship between Finland and Sweden only heightened these suspicions.

In fact, it does not appear that was the case. Germany saw an independent Finland as part of its strategy of preserving German naval supremacy in the Baltic against Russian encroachment, but otherwise Hitler's government had no special interest in Finland.

But as the German military rebuilt, as Germany annexed first Austria and then the Sudetenland, and as Germany spearheaded the creation of an anti-Communist alliance with Japan and Italy, Stalin and his government had to look to the defense of the Soviet Union, and in thinking about defending the USSR, one has to think about Leningrad.

Leningrad was no longer the capital of Russia, but it was still the Soviet Union's second most important city, and the Finnish border lay a mere forty kilometers away along the Karelian Isthmus. A tank brigade could cross that distance in an afternoon. Bombers could cross it in minutes.

Not that Finland had much of a military, but if the German Wehrmacht ever appeared along that border, the security situation in Leningrad would be grim indeed. Also, Finland controlled islands in the Gulf of Finland. Along with its ally Estonia, Finland would be in a good position to blockade the Soviet Union's outlet to the Baltic Sea.

In April 1938, a month after Germany occupied Austria, a Russian diplomat approached the Finnish foreign ministry to invite Finland into negotiations aimed at improving relations between the two countries. Nazi hostility to the Soviet Union was well known, and the Soviet Union needed assurances that Germany would not be permitted to use Finland as a base from which to make war on the USSR. If German military units were to be based in Finland, the Soviet government would not stand idly by, but was prepared to strike preemptively. On the other hand, if Finland could offer guarantees of its neutrality, the USSR would be willing to support Finland, economically and militarily.

The Finnish government responded that Finland was already committed to neutrality and was prepared to resist any attempt by any foreign power to station troops on Finnish territory. The

Soviet side responded that Finland's small and ill-equipped military made that pledge hollow. Finland would have to make a stronger commitment to safeguard Soviet interests. There were a number of small, uninhabited islands in the Gulf of Finland that were Finnish territory but were of no economic value. If Finland were willing to cede these islands to the Soviet Union, or at least grant the Soviet Union military basing rights on those islands, that gesture would reassure Moscow of Finland's commitment to respect Soviet security interests.

The Soviet representative was told that it would be politically impossible for a Finnish government to cede territory to Russia, and there the talks ended.

A year passed, but it was an eventful year, one that saw the Sudetenland Crisis, the Munich Conference, and the dismantling of Czechoslovakia. In the spring of 1939, Soviet diplomats approached Helsinki again with a more specific wish list: that Finland grant Russia a thirty-year lease on five specific islands in the Gulf of Finland. In exchange, the Soviets would cede to Finland a slice of territory in Karelia, along the Soviet-Finnish border.

You might be surprised to hear that within Finnish government circles, the loudest voice in favor of accepting the Soviet proposal was none other than Carl Gustaf Mannerheim, the general who had crushed the Red uprising in 1918. You may recall from episode 181 that Mannerheim had campaigned for the job of President of Finland in 1919, but had been passed over, largely because of leftist resentment over his ruthless suppression of the Reds. Mannerheim retired from public life for a while, but accepted an appointment as chair of the Finnish Defense Council in 1931, when he was 64 year old. Now, in 1939, at the age of 71, Bolshevism's fiercest opponent in Finland wanted to do the deal.

Why? Quite simply, as chair of the defense council, the now-Field Marshal Mannerheim knew better than anyone how ill prepared Finland was to resist the Red Army. He thought those five islands were a small price to pay to avoid a confrontation, but this was a minority view in Helsinki. Most thought the Soviets wouldn't dare attack Finland, and even if they did, the Finns would band together to repel them, and Mannerheim was just a tired old man.

Meanwhile, Stalin had watched the British and the French stand by and do nothing as the Germans subdued Czechoslovakia. What were the odds they'd go to war to defend Finland? Then came the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Agreement of August 1939 and its secret protocols granting the Soviet Union a free hand in the Baltic States and Finland. Once Germany invaded Poland and the French and British declared war, the Soviet hand was freer than ever.

It didn't take long for Stalin to make his moves. The Red Army moved into eastern Poland on September 17, as you already know, and just five days later, on September 22, the foreign minister of Estonia was invited to Moscow to discuss questions of mutual security. A week later, Estonia signed an agreement allowing the USSR rights to base air, sea, and land forces in Estonian territory. In October, the foreign ministers of first Latvia and then Lithuania were each

summoned to Moscow in their turn and soon those two countries also signed mutual assistance agreements with the Soviets.

That same October, Stalin's government invited a Finnish delegation to come to Moscow to discuss security questions. On October 12, this delegation met with Stalin himself and listened as he laid out his concerns. Leningrad was just too vulnerable, and with war raging in Europe, the Soviet Union had to be able to defend its second city. Therefore, the Soviet Union wanted Finland to cede to Russia a portion of the Karelian Isthmus, moving the border northwest to a point just 30 kilometers from Viipuri, Finland's second-largest city after Helsinki. Stalin also wanted four islands in the Gulf of Finland and a lease on the Hanko Peninsula, in southwestern Finland, where the Soviet Union would build a naval base. In return, Stalin was prepared to cede five thousand square kilometers of Karelian territory along the Finnish border farther north.

It's hard to judge Stalin's sincerity here. On the face of it, his request was not unreasonable, and his concern that the USSR might be attacked from the west will prove well founded. The question for the Finnish side was whether these concessions would satisfy Stalin and his government, or would they be back again in 1940, asking for another round of concessions. Did Stalin want peace, or was he operating from Hitler's playbook?

The Finnish foreign minister argued that the Russians were bluffing, and their proposal should be rejected. Mannerheim wanted to accept it. In the end, the Finnish side offered a compromise: Finland would agree to move the border on the Karelian Isthmus, though not as far as the Russians wanted. Finland would cede some, but not all, of the requested islands. The naval base on the Hanko Peninsula was a hard no. Finns would never agree to that.

Stalin rejected the Finnish counterproposal. He told the Finns that his own proposal was the minimum he was willing to accept. The Soviet side was surprised by the stiff Finnish resistance; surprised and suspicious. Surely the Finns didn't think they could stand up to the Red Army on their own, so where did this confidence come from? Had they already done a deal with Germany or some other power?

The talks broke down on November 9, but they ended amicably enough. Stalin and his foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov shook hands with each member of the Finnish delegation and wished them well. Then the Finns went home, while the Soviets began planning for war.

[music: Pacius, "Maamma"]

On November 26, the Soviet border village of Mainila was subjected to an artillery bombardment. Soviet foreign minister Molotov blamed Finland for the attack and demanded that Finnish forces withdraw twenty kilometers behind the border and that Finland apologize for the attack. The Finnish government denied responsibility for the attack and called for an investigation of the incident. The Soviet government rejected the Finnish response, renounced the non-aggression agreement, and broke diplomatic relations with Finland. In our time, it is

widely believed that the artillery attack on Mainila was conducted by Soviet forces. The Finns had very little artillery, for one thing.

Not only were they short on artillery, most of what they had was obsolete. Also, the Finns had next to no tanks, anti-tank weapons, or military aircraft, and their reserves of ammunition and fuel would only last for sixty days of hard fighting. Maybe not that long.

So, on the morning of November 30, 1939, when Soviet air units bombed Helsinki, Finland's capital, the Winter War began. Finnish prospects looked bleak.

Apart from the differences in arms and equipment, geography itself seemed to be favoring the Russians. If you look at a map of Finland, you might well think that its strategic situation is hopeless. The country is tall north-to-south, slender east-to-west with a narrow waist, and borders the Soviet Union all up and down its long eastern border. Given the Soviet Union's substantial numerical advantages, you might think Soviet strategy would be just a matter of lining up a large army along that border and marching west. Indeed, that's what many in the Soviet military thought. They predicted the war would last no longer than two weeks, and joked that the field commanders' biggest problem would be stopping the Red Army before it ran right over the border into Sweden.

But Finnish geography is more complicated than a glance at the map would lead you to believe. Most of the border runs through thick forests that were all but impenetrable to tanks and artillery guns. Only a small number of roads run east to west across the border, and it was at these roads that the Finns stationed their army.

At the far north of the country, Finland held the arctic port of Petsamo, a kind of little cousin of the Soviet Union's Murmansk, which was nearby. Petsamo was a lost cause; the Soviets had three divisions in Murmansk. Still, the loss of Petsamo would not seriously harm the Finnish war effort.

Don't overlook the fact that the Soviets had chosen December, the darkest month of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, to begin their war. Operations in the far north would be hampered not only by the terrain, but by cold and the endless dark.

The farther south you go along the border, the more favorable the terrain becomes for the Soviets, and the greater the danger to Finland. The Finns assumed the main theater of war would be the Karelian Isthmus, that strip of land 50-100 kilometers across that links Leningrad in the south with Viipuri in the north. Here was the most direct route from Russia into the most populated regions of Finland, and it was here that the main Soviet offensive could be expected. Isolated as it was, with the Lake Ladoga to the east and the Gulf of Finland to the west, the isthmus was not wide enough to allow for sweeping flanking maneuvers. The war here would be a head-to-head slog of modern forces, similar to the Western Front during the Great War. And while December might seem a strange choice of time to begin a war in northern regions, the fact

was it was a good time to go to war on the Karelian Isthmus. The winter freeze would ice over the water and freeze the ground, making it favorable for heavy vehicles like tanks, while the worst of the winter snow would not fall until January.

For these reasons, Finnish defensive preparations focused on the isthmus. The Finns had prepared a series of fortified positions in a line crossing the western part of the isthmus. After the war began, this string of fortified positions came to be known as the Mannerheim Line.

The Red Army had a substantial numerical advantage. It was also well equipped with tanks, artillery, and combat aircraft, while the Finns had barely any of these modern weapons. Oddly enough, the Red Army was also well equipped with anti-tank guns; never mind that the Finns had no tanks to use them against.

Just three months ago, the world had seen in Poland a demonstration of how easily a modern army, equipped with ample numbers of tanks, aircraft, and artillery pieces could shred an army that lacked them. A lot of people would have predicted the same outcome in Finland; they would be proved wrong.

Red Army doctrine and training was not as sophisticated as in the Wehrmacht, for one thing. German military training traditionally emphasized flexibility and allowed lower-ranking officers on the scene to exercise discretion. The Red Army favored mass attacks, ordered from above. Commanders on the scene were expected to do as they were told; deviation from orders could get you shot. And there were those Red Army political commissars on the scene just to make sure orders were followed to the letter.

The biggest shortcoming of the Red Army, though, was inadequate preparation for winter conditions. For the Finns, winter is a way of life. Finns know how to dress for the cold. They grow up learning to ski cross country. Finns understand the need for soldiers in cold conditions to get hot food, and a lot of it. Saunas are not a luxury in Finland; they are a necessity of life. In fact, it was the Finns who invented them and they knew how to build one in a log cabin or a pit dug into a hillside.

The Red Army was not adequately equipped for winter. The Army's favored rations: black bread and sweet tea were cold comfort. Literally. Soldiers lacked proper winter clothes or winter camouflage. Red Army tanks were painted olive green. In the bright white landscape of a Finnish winter, they stood out like...olive green tanks.

And then there were the intangibles of morale. Russian troops were not keen on the war, and certainly not keen about spending the winter outdoors. In fact, the winter of 1939-40 was one of the coldest winters on record in Europe, much to the Russians' misfortune. The Finns, on the other hand, were fighting for their homes. Most Finns still remembered what Russian rule had been like, and few who could wished to repeat that experience.

The first Soviet offensive was a run right up the Karelian Isthmus and through the Mannerheim line. Despite their presumed advantage in morale, the sight of waves of Soviet tanks heading straight for them was a terrifying one to most Finnish soldiers, many of whom were reservists with little training and zero experience fighting tanks. Alas for the Red Army, their armor doctrine was not well developed. It simply called for the armor to lead the advance, with the infantry following behind. In the first assault, Soviet armor went right through the Mannerheim line, past fortified positions that lacked weapons heavy enough to stop them. But when the infantry followed, the Finnish fortifications opened fire on them, pinning them down.

The advancing tanks simply stopped and waited for the infantry to catch up. That made them sitting ducks for the few anti-tank guns the Finns did have. Also: here is the dirty little secret of tank warfare. Tanks look rough and tough, but all you need is one enemy soldier to get up close and begin firing through the view slits, or better yet, stick something into the tank treads to immobilize the tank. That something can be as simple as a crowbar or a tree limb.

The hard part is getting up close. Attempting it can be lethal. But if a soldier does get close, that tank is in a lot of trouble. That's why proper tank doctrine includes infantry to screen against attacks of this kind, although at this stage, every military is still working the kinks out of their armor doctrines.

The bombing of Helsinki was immediately condemned by the international community, conducted as it was without a prior declaration of war and for no real military purpose. Soviet foreign minister Molotov denied that the bombing had taken place, saying that the Soviet Air Force was actually dropping parcels of humanitarian aid to starving Finnish civilians. This led to an ironic nickname for Soviet bombs: Molotov food baskets.

And when Finnish infantry began taking on Soviet tanks, besides the tree limbs and the crowbars, they also resorted to home-made gasoline bombs, in their crudest form just a glass bottle filled with gasoline and a cloth wick stuck into the neck. You set the wick on fire and throw the bottle; when it strikes its target and breaks, the gasoline is set on fire. The Finns did not invent these; it appears they were invented by Spanish Nationalist troops fighting against Soviet tanks in the Spanish Civil War, but the Finns are responsible for giving them the name by which they are best known today: the Molotov cocktail. They pair nicely with the Molotov food baskets. You see?

December 18, 1939 was Joseph Stalin's 61<sup>st</sup> birthday, and it is widely believed that the Red Army commanders hoped to hand him victory in Finland as a birthday present. This may explain why the Red Army spent the month of December in repeated, futile attacks on the Mannerheim Line. Russian infantry made mass charges across snow and ice in their olive uniforms, making them sitting ducks for Finnish machine guns and artillery. The Red Army disarmed Finnish mine fields by marching waves of soldiers across them until every mine was exploded...and the field was littered with human remains.

The carnage was so great that some Finnish machine gunners experienced psychological trauma from the killings they dealt. Pity the poor Red Army soldiers, who didn't understand why they were fighting, but were asked to march out onto a field of gleaming white ice into the sights of Finnish snipers in their olive drab uniforms. If they refused, they would be shot—and there is evidence thousands of them were. They could try surrendering to the Finns, but the Red Army officers and commissars had told them that the Finns torture their prisoners.

Along the long border, the Soviets surprised the Finns by assigning at least one division to virtually every road that crossed the border all the way up to the Arctic Ocean. And when I say “road,” understand that in most cases, I'm talking about an unpaved track winding through a dense, snowy forest.

The nastiest surprise came along the north shore of Lake Ladoga, opposite the Karelian Isthmus. The Finns anticipated that, besides the isthmus, this was the place most likely to see a Russian offensive, and so they stationed two of their fifteen divisions on this part of the front. But the Red Army sent in four divisions, plus air support. At first, the Soviet attack was a success. The Finnish units, composed mostly of reservists, were overwhelmed and retreated in panic.

This was a serious vulnerability for the Finns. A successful Soviet offensive would allow Red Army units to circle around the north shore of Lake Ladoga and attack the Mannerheim Line from the rear, which would likely end the war right there. The Finnish commander was sacked just a few days into the war; his successor was able to put together a defensive line and stave off disaster. Even better, for the Finns, on December 12, a single Finnish regiment of about 4,000 soldiers was able to take advantage of the superior mobility that came with their skill at cross-country skiing to slip across the frozen Lake Tolvajärvi to encircle and destroy a Red Army division of about 20,000 whose vehicles had gotten bogged down on a muddy road. The Soviet side lost 5,000 killed, a similar number wounded. The Finns captured dozens of artillery pieces, tanks, and other vehicles at a cost of about a hundred dead and 300 wounded.

The Battle of Tolvajärvi ended the Russian advance in this region, and the Finns were able to hold the line for the rest of the war.

Similarly, farther north, as heavy Soviet infantry divisions wound their way along muddy tracks through the deep forests of the region, they were neutralized by Finnish fighters on skis who deftly navigated the woods where the Red Army could not go. A small force would attack the head of the column, forcing the entire column to halt, then another small force would attack the rear of the column, blocking any retreat, then more Finns would attack the column from the woods on either side, forcing the Soviet soldiers to combine into small groups, isolated from one another, which the Finns would then gradually pick off.

It was this style of fighting, with Finnish soldiers on skis bursting from the forest to catch the Russians unawares, that captured the imagination of the rest of the world. It may sound strange, but foreign journalists covering this war found it much easier to reach Finland across the land

border from Sweden rather than by sea to Helsinki or Viipuri. So most of the fighting they witnessed was farther north, in the woods, and what they saw was plucky Finnish infantry skiing circles around the plodding Red Army.

The rest of the world was captured by these tales of Finnish pluck and determination, or *sisu*, a Finnish word that means roughly the same thing and was suddenly on the lips of newspaper readers everywhere, and this is the image that the Winter War brings to mind, even in our time.

But there are a few problems with this romantic picture. First of all, these Soviet units were easy enough to encircle, less so to capture. Soviet soldiers were indifferent on offense, but they fought like demons on defense. In some cases, the encircled Soviet units in the woods held out until the end of the war, tying down Finnish troops that were badly needed elsewhere.

Second, this colorful forest warfare made for good newspaper copy, but it wasn't crucial to the outcome. The crucial front was still on the Karelian Isthmus, where the combat remained stubbornly conventional. At the end of December, the Red Army paused its offensive operations on the Isthmus to give its units time to rest, regroup, and resupply, and to wait out the worst of the winter weather, which gave the world the impression that the Soviets had been stymied. But they were only waiting.

International sympathy was overwhelmingly with the Finns. On December 19, the League of Nations voted to expel the Soviet Union, which had only joined the League five years earlier, and called on member states to aid the Finns. On December 26, the recently elected Pope Pius XII, whom we've met before on this podcast when he was Vatican Secretary of State Eugenio Pacelli, publicly condemned the Soviet invasion, although there's no evidence either of these actions affected Soviet policy. One is inevitably reminded of Joseph Stalin's famous 1935 dismissal of the papacy in a different context, when he asked, "How many divisions has [the Pope] got?"

The Pope didn't have any divisions, and neither did the League of Nations, and for all the sympathy the Finns got and for all the condemnation heaped upon the Soviet Union, the rest of the world offered the Finns very little in the way of tangible assistance. It was difficult to get aid to Finland, for one thing. Germany had just signed a non-aggression agreement with the Soviet Union and was not willing to allow military aid to Finland through its territory. The Scandinavian countries of Sweden and Norway contributed aid to the Finns; the Finnish government hoped for direct Swedish military intervention, but that was not to be.

One of the reasons the Winter War got as much press attention as it did in was that the big war, the war between Germany on one side and France and Britain on the other, the conflict that had been dubbed World War II on the day the German invasion of Poland began, that war was going nowhere. This was the period of the so-called Sitzkrieg, the Phony War. With no news to report from the big war, this side conflict filled the void.

With little action on the Western front, some leaders in Paris and London, including Winston Churchill, supported a plan under which an Allied expeditionary force of about 130,000 British and French soldiers would land at the port of Narvik in northern Norway and cross through Scandinavia to aid the Finns. Besides offering the Finns relief, it was hoped that this move might bring Norway and Sweden into the Allied side in the war against Germany and deprive Germany of Swedish exports of iron ore, which were critical to German military production. But the Norwegian and Swedish governments were cool to this idea. They understood, correctly, that granting Allied forces transit rights through their countries would lead to Allied occupation of large parts of their respective nations and might provoke the USSR or Germany into armed intervention. The German government was very conscious of its need for Swedish ore imports and warned the Swedish government that allowing Allied soldiers on Swedish soil would trigger a German military response.

When the Allies formally requested transit rights from Norway and Sweden, in early February 1940, both nations refused.

By that time, early February, the Red Army had renewed its offensive on the Karelian Isthmus. The Soviet commander on that front, Kliment Voroshilov, was recalled and replaced by Semyon Timoshenko. The number of Red Army divisions on the isthmus was increased from ten to 25, and their units trained for assaults on Finnish fortified positions.

The Red Army outnumbered the Finns 3:1 on this front when they resumed their offensive in February. Within two weeks, they had broken through the Mannerheim Line. The Finns were forced to withdraw.

The Finnish government had been trying to reopen negotiations with the Soviet side since the beginning of the war, but the Soviets had refused to talk. But now, in mid-February, they relented and negotiations began. Reportedly, the Red Army commanders favored continuing the war, but they were overruled by Stalin and the Politburo. You might wonder why the Soviets would agree to talk now, after the main Finnish defensive line has collapsed, but consider some of their political concerns. The performance of the Red Army was embarrassing, and the longer the war dragged on, the worse the Soviet Union's image got. Maybe the condemnation of the Pope and the League of Nations counted for something after all. Also, it was March and the spring thaw was coming, which would surely have bogged down the Soviet offensive and meant the war would have to continue into summer.

At the end of February, the Finnish government agreed to Soviet terms. These amounted to all of their pre-war demands, plus concessions along the Karelian Isthmus, the north shore of Lake Ladoga, and Finland's arctic port of Petsamo. Overall, it tallied up to about 10% of Finland's land area, and home to about 12% of Finland's population, though one might question whether it was worth the 150,000 or so Soviet deaths, against some 26,000 Finns killed. One rueful Soviet

military commander remarked that the peace agreement had won the USSR just enough new land to bury its dead.

Three months later, in June 1940, the Soviet Union would use its new military bases in the Baltic States to annex Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. That same month, the USSR would demand the return of the formerly Russian territory of Bessarabia from Romania, and the government of Romania would yield and withdraw from the province.

In other words, by July 1, 1940, the Soviet Union would have recovered all the European territories that were formerly held by the Russian Empire...except Finland.

So what are we to make of the Winter War? Arguably, Finland was the only formerly Russian territory to escape re-annexation, thanks to the pluck, or *sisu*, shown by its Army during the war. Perhaps granting the USSR its demands without a fight, as the Baltic States had, would have condemned Finland to the same fate, while fighting the Red Army to a standstill convinced Stalin to abandon any plan to annex their country.

On the other hand, one could also argue that Stalin and his government had the perfect opportunity to annex Finland in the spring of 1940 and declined to do so, as they will decline another such opportunity in 1944. Trying to guess what was going on in the mind of a dictator is a dicey proposition, so I'll leave it to you to decide whether the Finns were wise or foolish to turn down Stalin's first offer and fight the Winter War.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Brent and Mitja for their kind donations, and thank you to Tenzing for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Brent and Mitja and Tenzing help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

The podcast website also contains notes about the music used on the podcast. Sometimes it's my own work, sometimes it's licensed, but many times, the music you hear here is free and downloadable. If you hear a piece of music on the podcast and you would like to know more about it, including the composer, the performers, and a link to where you can download it, that would be the place to go. While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we return to the main war, as it were, and consider exactly what was going on in the capitals of Europe during the Phony War. It's The Calm Before the Storm, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Foreign governments were hesitant to aid Finland, but Finland received the equivalent of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid during the war in private contributions from a number of countries. Some 12,000 foreigners volunteered to fight alongside the Finns during the Winter War, reminiscent of the International Brigades that fought for the Spanish Republic.

More than half of these volunteers came from neighboring Sweden, along with contingents from Denmark and Norway and Estonia and Italy and Hungary. Some 350 Americans volunteered, most of them of Finnish heritage, and a handful of British subjects, including the 17-year-old son of British Army officer, Lt. Colonel Geoffrey Lee. Afterward, he would serve in the RAF. In 1947, Christopher Lee appeared in his first feature film. He would have a long and storied career as a film actor, during which he would become noted for his deep, resonant voice.

[music: Closing War Theme]